

"The Covenant of Fraternity."

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# A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE

Cross Creek Lodge, No. 4,

I. O. O. F.,

ON

ODD FELLOWS' MEMORIAL DAY,

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BY

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# THE COVENANT OF FRATERNITY.

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I. SAMUEL 18:3.

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Near the quiet Potomac, in the city that bears his honored name, a tall shaft rises in commemoration of the fame, the deeds, and the character of Washington. Towering high above its surroundings, visible from the summit of the hills and the level of the plains, it catches the eye of the traveler, and arrests his earnest attention to the fact that a mighty people have given enduring expression to their gratitude for and appreciation of their true friend and great leader.

Nor does that monument stand alone. Every cemetery in this broad land has become a chapter in our National book of remembrance, and all who will may read the proud record of the days that were, learning therefrom to admire, revere, and love the great and good, who, having wrought their varied deeds of blessing for their fellows, now are resting—fallen on sleep.

It is proper and seemly that heroes should be remembered and their virtues acknowledged in fitting tribute; therefore have we now assembled, for Odd Fellowship has its memories, dear and precious, of its slumbering hosts, who, in life's battles against sin, suffering and sorrow, have proved themselves worthy of chaplets and immortelles. But how shall that tribute best be paid? The true monument to Washington is the republic that survives him. The only real, correct estimate of the fallen is in the principles for which they fell and the results of their efforts to maintain, defend and propagate those principles. The best sermon ever preached in defence of the Christ is the daily declaration of Christianity. No oration ever spoken so glorifies the heroes of the Revolution as does the possession of the Constitution. No sculptor, however inspired his brain, kind his



heart, or skilled his hand, can reproduce in monumental bronze or gleaming marble our own Lee, or writer, with ready pen, depict the glorious sacrifice of our defeated braves, as do the story of the cause for which they battled, and the blessed fruitage of their influence in this sunny land they loved so well and hallowed with love's richest offering. So no words of praise engraved on solid stone, or warm from the tenderest lip, however eloquent and impassioned, can do full justice to those heroes who heard the bugle call in Friendship's name, and with Love's mighty weapons fought beneath the stainless banner of Truth. To call their names and repeat the story of their lives might serve to tell *who* they were ; but I deem it far more desirable to present, in part at least, the principles that governed them, the motives that actuated them, and the effects produced by them, that thus may appear somewhat of *what* they were. And since the blessed Word of God is the storehouse whence they drew and we now draw our principles, so that every plank in the platform of Odd Fellowship is a Bible truth, I invite you to a consideration of the text, 1st Samuel 18th chapter, 3rd verse—"Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul." Our theme discloses itself,—

#### THE COVENANT OF FRATERNITY.

Two natural propositions are placed before us—(a) Fraternity. (b) Covenanted Fraternity. Let us consider them:

(a). Here in a clear light is presented a striking and pathetic picture of unswerving Friendship, unselfish Love, and unfaltering Truth, the three elements of the noblest and truest brotherhood of men. Here in these Hebrew youths is seen a satisfactory definition of that term—fraternity—as it stands forth in the beauty and fragrance of blossoming affection in their earlier years, or glows with the ripened fruits borne in the events of their later life. Here are manifested its cardinal principles ; here forecast its practical workings. Here is exemplified a relationship of interdependence between man and man, which, could it be personified, would stand before us in the form of a gentle, modest,



beautiful maiden,—pure in her purpose as the flowers that greet her,—tender and strong in her affections as the breezes that kiss her, and unselfish in her sympathy as the sunlight that falls upon her head,—a creature noble in mien, character and deed,—lovely, loving, lovable, and second in her graces and glories only to that elder sister, the religion of the soul. Of such fraternity Odd Fellowship proudly and justly claims to be a reliable exponent. Let us then examine, that we may better understand the truths upon which it is founded and better appreciate the actual results of this maiden's teachings and efforts among men.

The first lesson we draw is that *True Fraternity ignores the arbitrary limitations and distinctions of caste and class.*

Who is this Jonathan? Princely in grandeur of character, noble in feeling and in deed, he is also Prince in rank and name. The monarch on the throne hails him as his son, and the people make way for him in the cities of Judah. His raiment is like to that of those who abide in Kings' houses. His armor is that of one approved in war. His seat is with the counsellors. Servants obey his behest, and devoted followers are ready to give their lives for him. The tribes see in him a probable ruler, and all the emoluments of rank, station and power are rightfully his. Royalty receives him as an equal,—the world is open that he may make his alliances wheresoever he will. He—the Prince—the favored son of a proud and haughty King, the object of jealous solicitude, is one party to this covenant.

And who is this David? Is not Jesse of Bethlehem-Judah, his father? The days have not been many since the sheep bleated on the hillside while this boy of ruddy countenance with his shepherd's staff guided them to green pastures, or made them lie down by waters of stillness. A stripling from the country-side unused to the world's ways,—untainted by the world's wickedness. All ignorant he of the courtier's wiles, all untrained in skillful diplomacy. True, the eyes of the army were upon him yesterday as he faced the giant of Philistia. True, for him the welkin rang again when the people shouted at the victory, and the King took notice of him. But he is a peasant still; poor by his own confession, and with no claims to any



suit of mail to replace his shepherd's garb.

He, the humble countryman, is the other party to this covenant.

Is there not a chasm yawning deep and wide between the humble home of Bethlehem and the dwelling place of Saul? Does not the decision of the world fix a social gulf between the raw recruit and the warrior Prince? But Friendship springs up on the one side,—simple, steadfast Truth stands firmly on the other, and Love links these two together, bridging the distance between them and making them as one. What is the basis of this union? Not fame, nor rank, nor wealth; but worth in purple recognizes worth in ruder garb, and fraternity establishes an equality of manhood. Is not this admirable, that Jonathan can put all differences of rank aside? Would not the world be better could all men thus act toward their fellow-men? Are not the gradations and distinctions of society oftentimes arbitrary and apart from any true rule of difference? True fraternity strikes a blow at these false distinctions. It teaches that barriers erected upon financial rating or chance of birth should be demolished, and that exclusiveness should be of right from wrong, of worthiness from unworthiness. It magnifies character, and it minimizes reputation. It sees *the man* that is in the individual, and not the dress or fame, or wealth, or family. It speaks alike to the proud possessor of millions and the laborer for his daily bread. It has one voice for the honored son of science and the struggling mind unadorned with learning's favors. It says to all of high or low estate, rich or poor, famous or obscure, "Be true men yourselves; help others to be true men." Within its pale all claims to greatness, all pretension to distinction must be laid aside, and men are only what they make themselves. Does it appear too much a theory? This is our doctrine, this our earnest endeavor. Failure to attain the full height of our standard may sometimes occur; but every true Odd Fellow strives thus to judge, thus to be actuated. And where we fail, do not all associations of men come short of all they try to be and to accomplish?

Again we are taught that *True Fraternity ignores the limitations and distinctions of Nationality, Section, Party and Sect.*



David comes from the Lion tribe of Judah. Jonathan owes his lineage to the Wolf of Benjamin. One has but to read the history of the past or con the lessons of the present to understand how sectional lines and national boundaries are most often the limits to sympathy, confidence and fellowship. Whether the cruel hand of civil strife has carved out the place of division, or differences of habits, speech, thoughts and modes fix the markers, there is always a "thus far and no farther." Yet here is mutual confidence and esteem with no questioning as to their respective rights, no selfish clinging strictly to his own. A broader and clearer view of this same principle is given us in the parable of our Lord. Yonder in the defile of the hills, where the dark tressed pines wave a parting salute to the lord of day, lies one bruised and bleeding. His cloak taken from him, his raiment soiled and torn, the traveler, weak and faint, has suffered there alone since the morning hour when ruthless robbers smote him to the earth and left him to his fate. Hear the moan wrung from him by his pain. See the look of anguish on his features as he strives to draw himself nearer to that sheltering rock. Home and kindred are far away, and no one nigh to help him in this hour of need. Hark! A footfall on the rough roadway! Perhaps a friend comes in this approaching one. Even were it the robber chief himself, surely his hard heart would relent and pity move him to relief. The eye of the wounded man grows bright with hope, and his weak voice is raised in supplication and entreaty. Ha! a Priest—a servant of the Temple! Now for his office's sake he will draw nigh to this poor creature of the Most High God. But—no! He sees only contamination and defilement in that flowing blood, and drawing his robe closely about him he presses to the further edge of the road and—passes quickly by. A weary waiting, a terrible suspense, and again a footstep. How earnest is that quivering plea for help! How in that tone fear and hope struggle for the mastery! A Levite stands, and looks upon the wounded man, then—passes on. This is only a stranger—not a man of his section. He knows him not,—he cares not for him. It is not his business to look after sick or unfortunate ones. No doubt this sad plight is the



result of rash imprudence. He must hurry home before the robbers find him out and call him to account. And again the traveler is alone with his misery and his own sad reflections. Ah! Must he die there—die like a dog, alone, and uncared for? Have the flowers of sympathy all withered and died? And the stream of charity, has it turned from the earth? Is there no heart to pity,—no hand to save? Slowly a mounted traveler draws near. The evening shadows are not yet dense enough to hide the fact, made evident in dress and equipage, that he who comes is of Samaria. A man of different lineage, of different faith, of hostile race,—yet he stops,—and stoops to raise the sufferer. With kind words and gentle ministration he comforts and soothes the unfortunate. No matter that he is a Jew—no difference that he is a stranger,—enough that he is in sore need, and appeals for help. Time, beast, cloak, sympathy and purse are all lent unto the distress of this poor, bruised creature. One God gave both life, and one God will judge both lives. He is a man, and so a brother; he is in distress, and so a neighbor; he is a creature blessed of God with wonderful nature; he is in distress and helpless; the Samaritan can help him—and he does. That is fraternity, and not simply in the material assistance rendered, but in the higher sense that prejudice of nationality, sect and circumstance is overcome. To uplift the fallen, to encourage the faint, to strengthen the weak, to rescue from sorrow, suffering and sin wherever found, this is the work of human brotherhood,—this is the work Odd Fellowship undertakes to do.

In doing good the true brother waits not to ask a man his nationality, or whence he came.

Believing that the salvation of the soul and its instruction in the duties to its God belong to that higher organization, the Church, Odd Fellowship leaves all questions of creed and conscience to the jurisdiction of spiritual advisers, and refuses to assume any prerogative of the higher, divine institution. But it, as a part of true fraternity, inculcates morality, not only as theoretically good, but actually and practically a necessity to happiness. It rejoices in and appreciates civil as well as mental liberty, and strives to make of men good citizens, yet it is not an instructor in the



science of government and so has naught to do with politics or political combinations.

Again we are taught that *True Fraternity teaches each fellow to seek his brother's good as superior to his own advantage.*

Do we not know how strong the tide of public sentiment; how great the possibilities for a popular idol? Here, now, is this Prince making a covenant with one who has caught the ear of the army and attracted the eye of the people. May it not be that Jonathan swears to his own hurt? Or is it a keen stroke of diplomacy that makes him now beam upon the young shepherd and take him so close unto himself? Has Jonathan some deep design beneath this seeming affection which at the auspicious moment shall be unmasked, and is he entangling David in a service of self? Ah! the world has smiles for those of influence, and every day life can furnish us hosts of friends who will remain with us so long as skies are clear, breezes favorable and our bark is bounding on to success. While others cheer, they too can applaud,—while others speak commendably, they have no words of criticism. Many there are who can disrobe themselves, and suffer inconveniences, and make sacrifices for a season—*and for a purpose.* Was it so with Jonathan? Did he give up his robe, his girdle and his bow that in the days to come he might have a power to compel David's service for his own glory? Let us see. The scene changes. The brow of Saul is black with anger. David's deeds of valor have taught his name unto the maidens as they make ready their cymbals to greet the warriors' homeward march. Merit in the youth has marked him as envy's victim. Jealousy has aroused the King, and forgetting all pledges, ignoring the services of the young man, he has decreed his death. Instructions have been issued to Royal guards and Palace servants, and the valley of the shadow lies in the path of David. The people, seemingly at least, are in sympathy with the King, for his power is great, his anger terrible.

Ah! David, the lines are not now unto you in pleasant places, your enemies are round about you. Now is the test applied to Jonathan. Self-interest says "Forget your cov-



enant. Cut loose from him, save yourself, and win your father's smiles by deserting David." Even the King taunts him that he has chosen the stranger before his own blood. How does all this affect the Prince? See yonder rock? A fugitive hides behind it. See yon feast day in the King's house? Jonathan stands before his father and pleads for that fugitive. His own interests forgotten, his safety not considered, he makes his brother's cause his own and puts self to shame that his friend may be honored. And now in the field the lad has sought out the arrows, and hastens to the city. Jonathan stands face to face with David. All that can be done, he has done. Does he tell him that duty is discharged and leave him to his fate? Nay—listen, as the solemn words of the covenant renewed rise upon the morning air, "The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever." Ah! Jonathan, glorious art thou among the princes of Israel and thy name shall be kept in tender memory of all them that love their fellowmen. How grand thou art in thy self-humiliation! How precious are the tears that rain from thine eyes,—gems are they, exceeding diamonds in their purity and rarity,—beautiful gems from the casket of a true affection.

Thus does fraternity bind man with man. He who enters its mystic circle for his own good only, or deems it but an instrument for the accomplishment of his selfish design, knows not the purpose of its existence,—the secret of its continuance. No man can be a good Odd Fellow without becoming less selfish, broader in his sympathies and more generous in his life. And this unselfishness will lead him as it led Jonathan to apprise his brother of impending evil. To the lad the shooting of the arrows meant nothing; but to David it meant very much. So to the world the doings of Odd Fellowship appear as ordinary transactions or even idle sport; but to those within its covenant there are warnings in times of danger, tidings in days of safety, mutual sorrow and mutual comfort in seasons of distress, and mutual joy when all again is peace. The history of the Order is replete with incidents of the unselfish assistance rendered unto others. And I charge you, my brethren of the Covenant, remember he best fulfills his mission, and is



most worthy to wear the three links, who most diligently preserves his unselfishness, and most zealously upholds his brother's cause. The teaching given you in the hall of your Lodge is the seed,—the world offers opportunity,—your own lives must show the flower and the acceptable fruit.

Once more I remark that *True Fraternity is not limited even by the power of Death.*

The years have passed swiftly, and with their changes have brought a sceptre to the hand that once swayed a shepherd's crook, and a crown for the brow that once was gaily entwined with Spring's early offerings. Many changes have occurred. David has at last found rest from his enemies. The tribes have given their allegiance; and from the dark night of the past comes forth the future's morning, radiant with hope and glowing with signs of promise.

The day foretold is present with the new King, and surely it is a day for joy and praise and mirth. The sound of the harp is heard. The sweet singer of Israel gives utterance to the thoughts thronging his mind. But the chords are of a minor strain, and the song is slow and mournful as a dirge. Why stand the tears in the King's eyes like rain-drops on the bosom of the violet? Why doth he not celebrate his triumph? How is this that for a swelling "Te Laudamus" is substituted a wailing "Vae Victis"? Let us catch the sorrowful words of the Poet-King that we may know the weight lying so heavily upon his heart:

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath,—publish it not in the streets of Askelon: lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. \* \* \* \* Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles,—they were stronger than lions. \* \* \* \* How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O, Jonathan, slain in thy high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" The cares of state, the plaudits of the crowd, the triumph of the hour, the



relief from persecution, all have not driven from his mind and affection one whose soul in the long ago was knit unto his own. Jonathan living was his friend; Jonathan dead is not forgotten. This again is fraternity. To care for the sick, to comfort the dying, to perform the last sad offices for the dead,—all this is a part of our work. Nor does the grave hide our lost from memory's view. We recall their faces, and we recount their virtues. In our midst their memories live. Thus to-day we pay a tribute to all the host beyond the river, those who having faithfully learned and practised the teachings of Thos. Wildey and his noble confreres, have passed on to join the silent army on death's tenting ground. And here we pause to mention the names of two who sat with us but recently, and whose places in our hall now are vacant. From our own Lodge the messenger has called P. G. Henry C. Fisher, and Bro. James Vann. Peace unto their ashes.

“Oh! the lost, the unforgotten,  
Though the world be oft forgot.  
Oh! the lonely and the shrouded!  
In our hearts they perish not.”

But David's vow did not release him, even when the eulogy had been pronounced, and the tragedy of Gilboa fittingly commemorated. There was yet a duty to be performed. “Between my seed and thy seed.” The words ring in the King's ear—in the brother's heart. Who is this that goes with halting step to the King's table and eats of the King's meat? What does he here among the sons of David? For Jonathan's sake kindness was shown unto the house of Saul, and because of the Covenant of Fraternity, Mephibosheth of the seed of Jonathan has become the King's charge. Kindness to the widow and orphan,—a strong hand between them and the wolf,—a watchfulness for their welfare, belong to true fraternity. Hence it is that Odd Fellowship looks to an immediate future when the walls of her orphan's home shall stand complete, and the seed of the brethren realize in the fullest degree the blessings of the covenant.

A fund for that purpose, sufficient for a beginning, has been raised and the work will soon commence. That fund



will be increased until all demands shall be fully met.

And finally, (b), *True Fraternity best exists in mystic circles.*

That those who engage in the work of humanity can do more effective service by banding together needs no argument. Two illustrations will suffice. When the foe is afield, and war's rude alarm has wakened city and country to defence of native land, then it is that patriots go forth by companies, regiments, brigades, divisions. Each individual is responsible only for his own faithful performance of allotted duty, yet an organization embracing all is a necessity to the best discharge of individual responsibility. So in the great struggle for spiritual supremacy, churches and combinations of churches can do far more than the same number of individual Christians acting separately. There is a bundle of sticks—take them up one by one, and yon little child can break them all; but bind them close together, and the strong man finds all his efforts to destroy them vain. So of humanitarians. Unity is strength. But it has seemed to many very strange that these orders should maintain so much of secrecy. Many have distrusted them for this cause. Some have declared that the claims of Odd Fellowship were all pretence, and have said, "Why not make your doings known? Why so jealously guard your meetings—why have mystic rites at all?" They have attributed it to fear of criticism, and have thought we would be ashamed to make our "folly" known. In answer to these querists and complainers, I can only say, even this covenant of Jonathan and David was a secret between the two. The signal of the arrows was meaningless to the uninitiated. It was best for them because it gave them greater freedom of movement and expression. The purposes in view would have come to naught had the King's servants understood. Secrecy gives us a vantage ground for practical operation. Secrecy invests with interest, lends attractiveness; and a man will ponder more the thing he keeps within his own heart. And the rites incident to advancement in our order are far from meaningless or vain. There are lessons of wisdom for those who can learn them, and truths are impressed upon all who try them.



Our order is a protective one, exercising ward and watch-care over its members; it is necessary for the good of all that the incidents of our meetings should be kept within our own bounds. And that this secrecy is good for us is evidenced by the record of the year just closed. There was a gain of 20 lodges, a net gain of 19, and of 788 members, a net gain of 615 in North Carolina alone, and the number constantly increases. The membership in this State now is more than 2,025, and in Rebekah Lodges about 260. The amount expended for the relief of the sick and suffering and burial of the dead in North Carolina, from April 1889 to April 1890, was \$3,095, and the present assets are more than \$52,000. In the world we number more than 1,500,000 souls, with an annual income of \$12,000,000, more than half of which is expended in assisting the needy and distressed. The step of the advancing host is steady and firm. The banner of F. L. and T. waves in triumph over a united multitude, daily growing larger. Our benefactions are increasing. And I am glad that I can testify that the standard of membership is ever rising in quality as it increases in quantity, and the teachings of our order, now better understood, are more rigidly enforced. Like a queen regnant Odd Fellowship stands among her sister fraternities, and while she hails with joy the success of each one of them, and gives full credit for all they do and are,—in purity of teaching, in excellence of purpose, in loyalty to principle, in growth in favor and in power, she yields the palm to none.

Going forth in all her beautiful strength to minister to human need, she places the hand of man in that of his fellow-man, and whispers as she smiles upon their united clasp, "Ye are brethren—live in fraternity." May God bless her noble mission, and in all that she accomplishes or attempts, may He be glorified in the blessing of His creatures. AMEN.







